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PHL 499.01: Senior Seminar - The Welfare of Democracy

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PHL 499.01 Senior Seminar The Welfare of Democracy Spring 2017, Borgmann

CLASS AND INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

- Class Meeting: Tuesday/Thursday 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM, Liberal Arts Building Room 146
- Albert Borgmann's Office Liberal Arts Room 149
- Phone number: 406-243-2792
- [Albert's Email](mailto:albert.borgmann@umontana.edu): albert.borgmann@umontana.edu

INTENT OF THE COURSE

The course is intended to examine the moral requirements for a prospering democracy. It will consider the Kantian foundations of a just society, the existentialist critique of Kantianism, the role of technology in the shaping of society, and the bearing of the good life on the health and self-confidence of democracy.

TEXTS

- Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*: Introduction, chapters 1, 4, 6, and the Conclusion.
- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*: All of it.
- Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*: Chapters IV, V, VII, and VIII.

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

There will be three parts to the course:

1. The first six weeks will be devoted to selections from *The Continental Divide* to
 - a. become familiar with Cassirer's neo-Kantian conception of society and culture,
 - b. learn about the early Heidegger's critique of the neo-Kantian approach,
 - c. discuss the bearing of Cassirer's and Heidegger's views on the crisis of culture and democracy.
2. We will then take four weeks to study Rawls's neo-Kantian version of the just society.
3. In the remainder of the semester we will ask what a prospering democracy needs in addition to the Rawlsian requirements. In particular we will consider the impact of technology on justice and society and look for ways of discovering the good life and the good society in a technological world that faces the challenges global warming and global justice. We will take our prompts from the writings of the later Heidegger.

REQUIREMENTS

- a) Classroom Performance (50% of the course grade)
 - a. Toward the end of every other Tuesday, and on the day of the **final, Tuesday, May 9 at 8:00 AM** there will be a twenty minute test of three brief questions on the material covered in the preceding two weeks (not including the material of the Tuesday on which the test is given). You can make up a missed test prior to the next test. Otherwise you receive an F.
 - b. The first test is on **February 7**.
 - c. You can raise (but not lower) the overall test grade through class participation, asking for clarifications, asking questions of any kind, and offering objections or comments.
- b) Term Paper (50% of the course grade)
 - a. Pick a well-defined topic regarding justice, the threats to democracy, the forces that sustain democracy, conceptions of the good society, or morally defensible political responses to global warming or to the requirements of global justice. The emphasis has to be on original reflection, and

there has to be evidence of the material covered in class. I'll be glad to help in the formulation of a topic.

- b. The paper should be about 10 pp. long (2500 words), double-spaced, paginated, paper-clipped, the notes at the end of the paper; no outline or bibliography. Follow any of the standard formats.
- c. For graduate credit, the paper should be about 15 pp. long (3500 words). It has to incorporate some secondary material, two or so articles, a book or two, or two or so chapters from a book. Here too the emphasis has to be on original reflection.

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

- **Outline due: February 28.**
- **Draft due: March 28.**
- **Paper due: April 25**

DISABILITY MODIFICATIONS:

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and [Disability Services for Students](#). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or call 406.243.2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification. **If you have a disability, please let me know so we can provide accommodations.**